

# Introduction to 20th Century American Art

**Selections from the Permanent Collection  
Whitney Museum of American Art**



The Whitney Museum of American Art was founded in 1930 by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney. Since then its Permanent Collection has grown to over 5,500 works—drawings, paintings, photographs, prints, and sculpture. Many of these were acquired while the artists were alive, often when they were in need of support. Other works have come through the generosity of artists, private collectors, and public foundations. As the Museum's 50th anniversary approaches, the Permanent Collection now embodies a substantial portion of the history and tradition of 20th-century

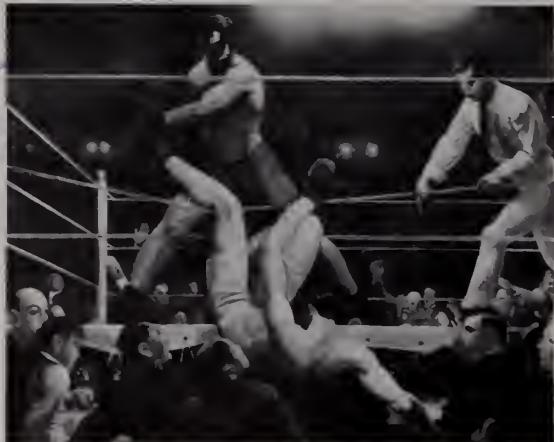
American art. It constitutes a background for the Museum's program of changing exhibitions and a resource against which new art can be measured.

The eighteen works illustrated here have been selected to show significant aspects of the development of American art of the 20th century, and to mark the achievement of some of the outstanding artists of our time. This core group of some of the most important works in the Collection reflects its strengths and provides a sense of the diversity and richness characteristic of American art.



Maurice Prendergast (1859–1924)  
*Central Park*, 1901  
Watercolor on paper, 14 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 21 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches  
Purchase 32.42\*

GVW



George Bellows (1882–1925)  
*Dempsey and Firpo*, 1924  
Oil on canvas, 51 x 63 $\frac{1}{4}$  inches  
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.95

Though **Maurice Prendergast** was a member of The Eight, his art cannot be associated with the brutal urban realism of many of the other members in the group (which included Arthur B. Davies, William Glackens, Robert Henri, Ernest Lawson, George Luks, Maurice Prendergast, Everett Shinn, and John Sloan). He was, however, the most "modern" of them all. Essentially self-taught, Prendergast's art was profoundly affected by his travels to Europe, particularly to France (1891–94) and France and Italy (1898–99). The first American to show the influence of Cézanne, Prendergast traded the more structured facetting of this progenitor of modernism for his own lateral daubs of color; the effect of Prendergast's style has often been compared to mosaic or tapestry. *Central Park* is one of a group of watercolors completed in 1901. This same year Prendergast began to paint in oil with a seriousness he had previously reserved for watercolor. Made thirteen years before his move to New York City from Boston, *Central Park* betrays a visitor's fascination with the spectacle of New York's Belle Epoque, capturing a particular moment in an eloquent frieze, and "making the world more beautiful than it is"—words that he underlined in his copy of a book called *Maxims of French Art*. Though not Prendergast's first mature work, these watercolors came at a time when he was beginning to receive official attention. They exemplify his gift for realizing a scene with fragmentary, almost abstract strokes of color, and his extraordinary technical ability as a watercolorist.

Beginning in 1907 **George Bellows** used the prize-fight as the subject of six major oil paintings and numerous related drawings and prints. *Dempsey and Firpo* was Bellows's final exploration of this theme. He remarked of the subject: "I don't know anything about boxing; I'm just painting two men trying to kill each other." Assigned to make an illustration of the fight for the New York *Evening Journal*, Bellows—and a crowd of 90,000—attended the event on September 1, 1923. As he reported, "when Dempsey was knocked through the ropes he fell in my lap. I cursed him a bit and placed him carefully back in the ring with instructions to be of good cheer." Bellows chose this episode from the first round of the two-round fight, in which Dempsey was ultimately the victor over his Argentine opponent, as the subject of his illustration, sketches, two prints, and subsequent painting. The artist's bald head can be seen at the extreme left, where he discreetly moved himself from the center of the composition. Bellows died at forty-two, seven months after finishing the painting, which was bought from the artist's widow six years later for \$18,500. It was the most expensive painting acquired for the museum by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney up to that time.

\*The acquisition number of a work refers first to the year and then to the sequence of its addition to the Permanent Collection during that year.



Marsden Hartley (1877-1943)  
*Painting, Number 5*, 1914-15  
Oil on canvas, 39½ x 31¾ inches  
Anonymous gift 58.65

Unlike almost all his contemporaries who visited Europe in the first decades of the 20th century, **Marsden Hartley** made Germany his geographical and aesthetic base. Quickly concluding the almost obligatory visit to Paris, he went on to Germany in 1913 and 1914-15, and there came in contact with the Blue Rider group, in particular Franz Marc and Wassily Kandinsky. Hartley's rapid embrace of modernism was as dramatic, self-conscious, and sure as that of any of his contemporaries. *Painting, Number 5* is one of the most abstract of a series of pictures in memory of a young German officer, a friend of Hartley's, who had been awarded the Iron Cross shortly before his death in the war. Evoking the militaristic atmosphere of Berlin at the time, the flags, insignias, and uniform accoutrements merge in an abstraction that clearly owed a debt to Cubism, the influence of Robert and Sonia Delaunay, and the emotional content and color of German Expressionism. Like his fellow Americans Patrick Henry Bruce, John Marin, Morgan Russell, Joseph Stella, and Max Weber, Hartley developed an art strongly based on European precedents while clearly recognizable as his own. All of these artists, with the exception of Weber, were included in the watershed International Exhibition of Modern Art—or as it is best known, the Armory Show—in New York in 1913. In spite of their awkwardness and their occasional confusion of surface effects with fundamental aesthetic ideas, the American modernists succeeded in establishing, with their audacious departures from observed reality, a belief in the possibilities of the new.



Patrick Henry Bruce (1881-1936)  
*Painting*, c. 1926-28  
Oil on canvas, 35 x 45¾ inches  
Anonymous gift 54.20

With his life's work represented by an extant group of less than 100 paintings, **Patrick Henry Bruce** has been an underseen and underrated artist. His extended expatriate existence in France from 1904 to 1936 and his suicide at fifty-five forcefully bespeak the difficulties of American abstract artists in the 1920s and 1930s. It was in his final series of abstract still-life arrangements (of which twenty-five still exist, dated conjecturally between 1918 and 1932) that Bruce especially proved himself to be a painter of masterful authority and achievement. His images in this series are often recognizable: in *Painting*, for instance, the tabletop, the hat, the vase, and the flower. Bruce's art shows the influence of Cézanne, Matisse, with whom he studied, and his friends the Delaunays. The ideas of his fellow Americans the Synchromists Macdonald-Wright and Russell, his reading of 19th-century color theorists like Chevreul and Rood, and his awareness of the work of the Purist artists Le Corbusier and Amédée Ozenfant are all apparent in his forthright coloration and the simplicity of his compositions. Through this boldness, works like *Painting* transcend their subject to become exhilarating expressions of pure color and geometric form. They are a prescient realization of the strict hard-edged abstraction that so many of the pioneer non-objective members of the American Abstract Artists group were to adopt in the late 1930s.



Charles Demuth (1883–1935)

*My Egypt*, 1927

Oil on composition board, 35 3/4 x 30 inches

Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.172

The grain elevators—now demolished—of John W. Eshelman & Sons' Feed Mills in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, were the subject of **Charles Demuth's** *My Egypt*, which celebrates their monumental grandeur and seemingly timeless functionalism. Demuth was a friend of Marcel Duchamp, who arrived in America in 1915 and who, with his use of complex, witty designations for his own works, may well have inspired Demuth's title. Made during one of the artist's frequent stays with his mother in Lancaster, where he was born and where he was to die within a decade, the painting reflects his attachment to this agrarian community. Demuth's deep feeling for the fertility of the land was also expressed in his many controlled and elegant watercolors of flowers, fruits, and vegetables, seen alone or in still-life arrangements. Two years before *My Egypt* was painted, Demuth showed with Arthur G. Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Georgia O'Keeffe, Alfred Stieglitz, and the photographer Paul Strand in Stieglitz's seminal "Seven Americans" exhibition. It was Stieglitz who in 1935 said of *My Egypt* that it was "perhaps the finest sense of a modern age that has been expessed." Its pyramidlike monumentality, frontal focus and symmetry, and radiating lines of force (so reminiscent of, yet so distinct from Marin's use of this pictorial device) unquestionably make it Demuth's finest Precisionist painting of a vernacular structure. It exemplifies his frequently quoted conviction that "John Marin and I drew inspiration from the same source, French modernism. He brought his up in buckets and spilt much along the way. I dipped mine out in teaspoons, but never spilt a drop."



Georgia O'Keeffe (b. 1887)

*The White Calico Flower*, 1931

Oil on canvas, 30 x 36 inches

Purchase 32.26

**Georgia O'Keeffe** began her series of paintings of flowers magnified many times their natural size in 1924; it was the same year that she married Alfred Stieglitz. A champion of the European and American avant-garde since 1905, Stieglitz became increasingly involved in his galleries and publications with art that was assertively American. Between 1925 and his death in 1946, the majority of his efforts were directed toward the exhibition and support of the work of, among other artists, Charles Demuth, Arthur G. Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, and of course O'Keeffe. Within this group O'Keeffe had a special place: she was the only woman, she sold at higher prices than the others, and she received greater critical attention and acclaim. Poised between abstraction and representation, her best work always resists verbal explication. Even as representational a painting as *The White Calico Flower* was hung with its stem and leaves in the upper right-hand corner for over thirty years. Actually, O'Keeffe's white flower is, as the title indicates, not a real one; it was based upon the cloth flowers worn by women in the area of New Mexico where she began spending her summers in 1929. As her friend Marsden Hartley once noted, the flowers in this series, which essentially concluded in the early 1930s, are "so huge that they shut out the sky above them—shut out even the morning that opens them." It was O'Keeffe's intention to "paint it big and they will be surprised into taking time to look at it—I will make even busy New Yorkers take time to see what I see of flowers."



Edward Hopper (1882-1967)

*Early Sunday Morning*, 1930

Oil on canvas, 35 x 60 inches

Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.426

Illustrated on cover



Ralston Crawford (1906-1978)

*Steel Foundry, Coatesville, Pa.*, 1936-37

Oil on canvas, 32 x 40 inches

Purchase 37.10

## River Rouge Plant by Sheeler

**Edward Hopper** was given his first one-person exhibitions in 1920 and 1922 at the Whitney Studio Club, the forerunner of the Whitney Museum of American Art. Thus began a significant association between the artist and the Museum, which culminated in 1968 with the bequest to the Museum, by Hopper's widow, of his artistic estate. It consisted of paintings, drawings, working studies, and prints, and remains the largest gift of works of art in the Museum's history. *Early Sunday Morning*, acquired from the artist shortly after it was finished, was the first painting by Edward Hopper to enter the Permanent Collection. It was recognized then and is still regarded as one of his most evocative works. Given the basically conservative character of his life and art, it is ironic that Hopper's paintings are now enthusiastically admired for their loose, rich handling of paint and the stark abstraction of their often bleak compositions. Hopper was trained and worked as an illustrator, but his art steadily evolved from the rapid rendering of specific scenes to careful distillations of urban and rural locales and their subdued inhabitants. In *Early Sunday Morning* Hopper has simplified his Seventh Avenue, New York City, scene to its component verticals and horizontals, its contrasting shadow and light. Topical detail, favored by contemporaries like Reginald Marsh, is eschewed: the lettering on the store windows, for instance, is intentionally illegible. Hopper's homage to Charles Burchfield applies equally well to himself: "he extracted a quality that we may call poetic, romantic, lyric. . . . By sympathy with the particular he has made it epic and universal."

**Ralston Crawford's** precise simplifications of the American scene in the 1930s and early 1940s, though at the beginning of his career, are among his most significant paintings. Depicting the functional architecture of agriculture, commerce, and industry, the works of this period, like *Steel Foundry, Coatesville, Pa.*, exemplify the Precisionist aesthetic in American art. By a coincidence the painting was done only a few miles away from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where Charles Demuth painted *My Egypt*. Crawford had originally come to know this area during the time of his education at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and the Barnes Foundation. Precisionism, whose advocates included Charles Demuth, Georgia O'Keeffe, Charles Sheeler, and Niles Spencer, began around 1920 and continued through the 1940s. With an expressed admiration for Cézanne, Gris, and Picasso, Crawford, like all of the Precisionists, derived his art from Cubism. In Analytic Cubism's recognizable forms, subdued coloration, and flattened space, American artists saw a means to convert the powerful shapes of vernacular structures to aesthetic purpose. Precisionism, American Scene painting, and Regionalism were part of the general isolationist reaction in the 1930s to modernism's "art for art's sake" and to non-objective painting and sculpture. The chopped edges and asymmetrical composition of *Steel Foundry, Coatesville, Pa.*, reveal Crawford's art at its most studied and representational; his later paintings and drawings sought a more emotional and abstract approach to form.



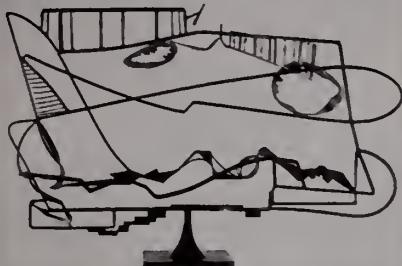
Isamu Noguchi (b. 1904)  
*Humpty Dumpty*, 1946  
Ribbon slate,  $58\frac{3}{4} \times 20\frac{3}{4} \times 18$  inches  
Purchase 47.7



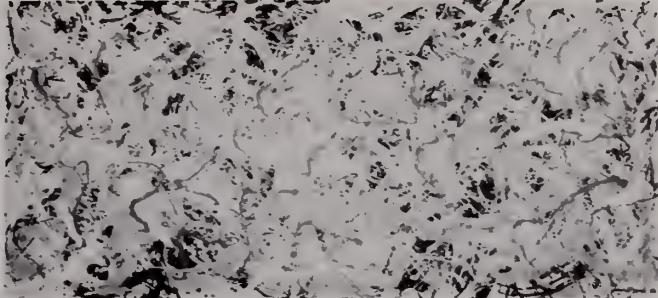
Arshile Gorky (1904–1948)  
*The Betrothal, II*, 1947  
Oil on canvas,  $50\frac{3}{4} \times 38$  inches  
Purchase 50.3

The refined contrast between simplicity and detail in **Isamu Noguchi's** *Humpty Dumpty* is characteristic of the artist's works. Born in the United States of a Japanese father and an American mother, Noguchi was raised in Japan, where he still spends a portion of every year. Interested in becoming an artist in the years following his return to the United States in 1918, he encountered the sculpture of Constantin Brancusi in 1926 and "was transfixed by his vision." On a Guggenheim fellowship in Paris at the age of twenty-three, Noguchi became for a year Brancusi's studio assistant and stonemason. His stage designs for Martha Graham beginning in 1935, and such public commissions as the UNESCO headquarters gardens in Paris, the Chase Manhattan Bank's sunken garden in New York, and Detroit's Civic Center Plaza have communicated his personal vision to a large public. *Humpty Dumpty* is one of a series of marble and slate sculptures done between 1944 and 1948. They were derived in part from the interlocking sets for a Martha Graham dance of 1944, and the availability of these materials in thin slabs at that time in New York. The humor of this piece, with its reference to the nursery-rhyme riddle of the figure that could not be put together again, is unusual in Noguchi's work. The sculpture's curving, interlocked biomorphic shapes are related to the forms in the paintings of his friends Arshile Gorky and Willem de Kooning, though Noguchi's intentions for his works are distinctly removed from those of these artists. Noguchi has commented of his use of natural materials that "wood and stone, alive before man was, have the greater capacity to comfort us in the reality of being."

**Arshile Gorky**, whose original name was Vosdanig Adoian, was born in Armenia and emigrated to the United States in 1920. Deeply influenced by, in turn, the art of Cézanne, Picasso, and Miró, his special style began to emerge in the late 1930s. His friendship with Stuart Davis and Willem de Kooning formed a bond among a new generation of American abstractionists. In the final eight years of his life, Gorky's art suggested the forms and processes of nature, and expressed a search for visual coordinates for his complex inner emotions and his memories of Armenia. Among the European artists and intellectuals who fled to America before and during the Second World War, and who provided a potent presence during the years of the breakthrough of the Abstract Expressionists, André Breton took a special interest in Gorky. He praised his ability to "decode nature to reveal the very rhythm of life." *The Betrothal, II* is considered one of the most masterful and refined of Gorky's late paintings. Its interpretation is difficult and problematic, though certain viewers have discerned a horse and rider in the left-hand side of the composition: the rider has a pastel-toned head and the horse, a dark head, hoof, and tail. One might also detect in the painting's tightly outlined forms a second, striding figure carrying a banner or a lance behind the horse and rider. Both images echo the art of Paolo Uccello, the 15th-century Florentine painter whose compressed, luminous, and often foreshortened compositions were admired by the Surrealists and Gorky. The meaning of these shapes might be interpreted as a symbolic, possibly religious, coupling of such figures, a betrothal of representation and abstraction.



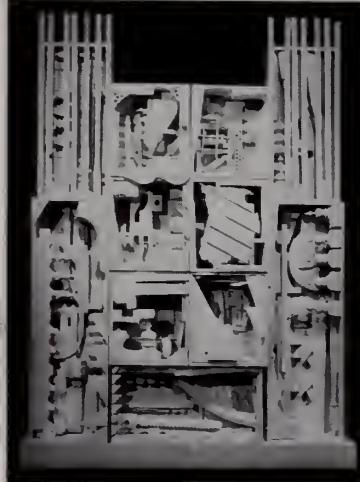
David Smith (1906–1965)  
*Hudson River Landscape*, 1951  
Steel, 49½ x 75 x 16¾ inches  
Purchase 54.14



Jackson Pollock (1912–1956)  
*Number 27, 1950*  
Oil on canvas, 49 x 106 inches  
Purchase 53.12

*Hudson River Landscape* was **David Smith's** final and most ambitious treatment of a landscape theme, one that he had first used in 1946. The sculpture is marked by its large scale, exuberant description of the details and spirit of a place, and refined welding skills. The source of *Hudson River Landscape* was a particular segment of Smith's frequent journey between New York City and the Bolton Landing farm near Lake George, New York, which he purchased in 1929 and where he lived from 1940 until his death in 1965. Smith has left his own account of the piece in an article published in the *College Art Journal* in 1954: "This sculpture came in part from dozens of drawings made on a train between Albany and Poughkeepsie, a synthesis of ten trips over a 75 mile stretch. Later, while drawing, I shook a quart bottle of India ink and it flew over my hand. It looked like my river landscape. I placed my hand on paper. From the image that remained, I travelled with the landscape, drawing other landscapes and their objects, with additions, deductions, directives, which flashed unrecognized into the drawing, elements of which are in the sculpture. Is my sculpture the Hudson River? Or is it the travel and the vision? Or does it matter? The sculpture exists on its own; it is an entity."

**Jackson Pollock's** abstract mergings of line, color, and movement have inspired succeeding generations of artists. He is acknowledged as the leader of Abstract Expressionism or, as it is also known, Action Painting. It was Pollock and his generation, which included Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, Franz Kline, Mark Rothko, David Smith, and others, who brought American art to international fame and prominence in the years following the Second World War. Works like *Number 27, 1950* are identified as Pollock's greatest achievements. It is precisely their elimination of the distinctive aspects of line, color, form, and perspective that gives these paintings their conclusive, ultimate originality. Their pictorialization of thought converted to action, of the externalizing of the subconscious, gives them their special power. As Pollock explained, "I want to express my feelings rather than illustrate them." In 1947, describing his working methods for the series of which *Number 27, 1950* is a part, Pollock remarked: "When I am in my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of 'get acquainted' period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own. I try to make it come through." On another occasion, when he was asked by the painter and teacher Hans Hofmann if he worked from nature, Pollock responded, "I am nature."



Louise Nevelson (b.1900)  
*Dawn's Wedding Chapel II*, 1959  
Painted wood, 116 x 83½ x 10½ inches  
Gift of the Howard and Jean Lipman Foundation, Inc. 70.68

Replaced  
by  
3 Flags  
Johns



Stuart Davis (1894–1964)  
*The Paris Bit*, 1959  
Oil on canvas, 46 x 60 inches  
Gift of the Friends of the Whitney Museum of American Art 59.38

In 1959 **Louise Nevelson** was invited to participate in the exhibition "Sixteen Americans" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. She titled her ambitious assemblage for this show *Dawn's Wedding Feast*; *Dawn's Wedding Chapel II* is composed of reassembled sections of that piece. Since Nevelson had worked in the preceding ten years entirely in black, her use of white for the elements of *Dawn's Wedding Feast* was a striking departure. Having considered herself an "Architect of Shadow," she became an "Architect of Light." With its associations of purity, cleanliness, openness, and affirmation, Nevelson herself said of *Dawn's Wedding Feast* that it was "a white wedding cake. A wedding mirror. A pillow . . . a kind of fulfillment, a transition to a marriage with the world." Nevelson's found wooden elements combine in a way that echoes the practicality of her father's job as a builder and owner of a lumberyard as much as it does her brief study in 1931 with Hans Hofmann. From Hofmann she derived a commitment to Cubist form, and her work shortly thereafter with the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera taught her that art must have monumental scale and be an essential part of life. As in so many of her works, the issues of chance, transformation, and the unification of disparate parts by the use of monochromatic color come together in *Dawn's Wedding Chapel II*.

Inspired by jazz rhythms, street signs, and urban buildings, **Stuart Davis** parted from the European modernist influence that characterized much of the American abstract art of the 1920s and 1930s. He simplified and stylized Cubist pictorial structure in the context of the American scene. With his delight in street life, commercial subject matter, and the use of lettering and intense color, he anticipated many aspects of Pop Art. The subject of the complex tricolor design of *The Paris Bit* is the nostalgic recollection by the artist in his mid-sixties of his first trip to Paris. The "28" in the upper left-hand corner states the year of that deliberately delayed journey to the center of artistic modernism—a trip paid for by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney's acquisition of two of his paintings. Upon inspection, BELLE FRANCE, EAU, TABAC, a cup of coffee and a seltzer bottle on a white café table, and other remembered words and scenes materialize within the entangled elements of *The Paris Bit*. In fact, the composition, as recent research has indicated, derives from Davis's smaller Paris painting of 1928, *Rue Lippe*, in which the essential structure of this later work was originally presented. All of its elements are subordinated to a strict sense of design; even the artist's own signature in the lower center is rendered upside down to conform to the artistic needs of this vivid ordering of his Parisian memories.



Willem de Kooning (b. 1904)

*Door to the River*, 1960

Oil on canvas, 80 x 70 inches

Gift of the Friends of the

Whitney Museum of American Art

(and purchase) 60.63



Roy Lichtenstein (b. 1923)

*Little Big Painting*, 1965

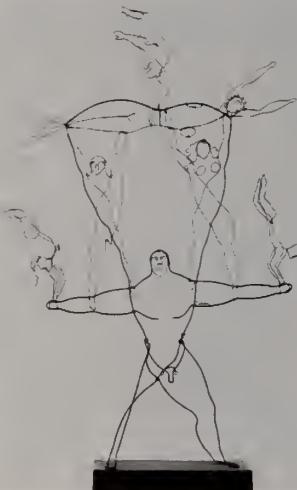
Oil on canvas, 68 x 80 inches

Gift of the Friends of the Whitney Museum of

American Art 66.2

**Willem de Kooning** came to the United States in 1926 from his native Holland. In the late 1940s he was one of a group of artists, including Franz Kline, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Clyfford Still, who were the leaders of the Abstract Expressionist movement. De Kooning's fierce reintroduction of the figure in his *Woman* paintings of the early 1950s seemed for a time to be a renunciation of Abstract Expressionism. But his work at mid-decade turned toward larger scaled landscape abstractions. As his most articulate, consistent, and sympathetic critic, Thomas B. Hess, noted in the evolution of de Kooning's art, "by the spring of 1955, the figure was engulfed in the new forms, as a jungle will obliterate a shrine." Between the birth of his daughter Lisa in 1956 and his move in 1963 to The Springs, Long Island, New York, de Kooning painted some of his most authoritative, dramatic, and colorful works. *Door to the River* was made at a mid-point between these two central events in de Kooning's life; it was acquired by the Museum within a few months of its completion. The blue band of the river, the framed off-center doorway, the yellow sunlight, and its Rubensian pink are the essential elements of this more simplified composition. Swiftly and directly realized, it does not bear the marks of the continual reworking of earlier paintings or display the expressionist abandon and coloristic density of his later works.

After working in the Abstract Expressionist style that prevailed in the 1950s, **Roy Lichtenstein** embarked in the early 1960s on one that was radically different. His straightforward depictions of cartoon figures such as Donald Duck, Mickey Mouse, and Popeye were followed by works that utilized the vehicle of a magnified comic-strip image on a seemingly printed ground of benday dots. His ironic and impersonal treatment of his subjects can be seen as a reaction to the intensity and individuality of Abstract Expressionism. Lichtenstein, like other Pop artists such as Claes Oldenburg, Andy Warhol, and Tom Wesselmann, has plundered the works of established artists for his own art. He has re-presented paintings by Cézanne, Picasso, Mondrian, Monet, Matisse, and the Surrealists. In 1965 in *Little Big Painting* he isolated and magnified Abstract Expressionist, de Kooning-like brushstrokes. For the actual imagery of this series he applied paint strokes on clear plastic acetate sheets, which were then projected and transferred onto canvas. Abstract Expressionism's assertion that the creative act is a struggle between the artist and the realization of the work of art is casually sabotaged in Lichtenstein's floating, dripping, solid-toned slashes of pigment. Within a decade of some of its highest and most heroic moments, an avant-garde art movement was annexed by Lichtenstein as yet another aspect of popular or mass culture. *Little Big Painting* commercializes and stylizes the emotional and spiritual energy of Abstract Expressionism with the precision and wit that marks Lichtenstein's general attitude toward subject matter.



Alexander Calder (1898-1976)

*The Brass Family*, 1927

Brass wire, 64 x 41 x 8½ inches

Gift of the artist 69.255



Gaston Lachaise (1882-1935)

*Standing Woman*, 1912-27

Bronze, 70 x 28 x 16 inches

Purchase 36.91

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**Alexander Calder** once told his sister, "I think best in wire." In the seven acrobats of *The Brass Family*, Calder realized one of his wittiest and most ambitious uses of this material. Only one aspect of a multi-phased career, Calder's wire sculptures seem to translate drawn line into space; as a French critic said of his first one-person show in Paris in 1929, "wire becomes statue." It is clear that from the start Calder conceived his ideas three dimensionally. His ink drawings, which so perfectly complement the wire sculptures, were executed somewhat later. Both the wire sculptures, which included animal depictions and portraiture, and the ink drawings of the early 1930s reflect Calder's passion for the circus, beginning in 1925 with his first sketches—as a freelance newspaper artist—of Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus. In Paris the following year, Calder started his miniature circus, now on view on the first floor of the Whitney Museum. As his friend James Johnson Sweeney has noted: "The circus . . . taught Calder the esthetic of the unfinished, of suspense and surprise." While he worked on his wire entertainers, animals, and later static non-objective wire shapes, Calder was also carving in wood. The solidity and tangibility of this medium balanced the linear fragility of wire. It is Calder's central and most creative achievement that in the constructions, mobiles, and stabiles of the later 1920s, line, form, and mass, the basic properties of the wire and wood works, are combined. In the mobiles particularly, the energy and constant activity that Calder found in the circus were released in a completely new form of abstract sculpture.

**Gaston Lachaise** was formed as an artist by a series of apprenticeships with, among others in Paris, his cabinetmaker father and the designer-craftsman René Lalique, and in the United States with the sculptors Henry Hudson Kitson and Paul Manship. His devoted association with Isabel Dutard Nagle, an American, married and somewhat his senior, began in Paris about the turn of the century; they were to marry in 1917. Lachaise started work on his *Standing Woman* (1912-27) the year he moved to New York, six years after his arrival in this country from his native France. He used his future wife as his model but later amplified the form from his own imagination. It was originally shown in plaster in 1918 at Lachaise's first one-person exhibition at the Bourgeois Gallery, New York. Because of economic difficulties he was unable to cast the work in bronze until 1927; the bronze version was shown publicly the following year. Though he made numerous portraits of men and women, animal studies, and decorative architectural ornaments, Lachaise's essential aim was "to express . . . the glorification of the human being, of the human body, of the human spirit, with all there is of daring magnificence."

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Text by Patterson Sims

Associate Curator, Permanent Collection

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